

I really have many favorite hymns, but when Jordan asked if I had one - "When peace like a River Attendeth my Way" was just singing in my head.

This hymn was written by Horatio Spafford in the 1870's. He was a lawyer and a real-estate investor and lost everything in the Chicago fire of 1871. He was a married man with 5 children - 4 girls and a boy, and soon after the fire his 4 yr. old son died of scarlet fever.

He was devastated and in need of spiritual comfort - so when he heard about two Evangelists, D.L. Moody & Ira Sankey in England, he decided to take his wife and daughters on a family vacation to Europe - and he could attend some of the Evangelists meetings.

He booked passage for his family on the french liner Ville du Havre but just before they were to sail and urgent matter came up in New York and he was detained. He settled his family on the ship, said his good-byes and promised to join them soon.

During the night of Nov. 23, 1873, the passengers were jolted from their bunks and the ship began to fill up with water. They had collided with an iron sailing vessel. The nightmarish scene that followed was indescribable. 226 people lost their lives, including all their daughters, but his wife was rescued, nearly unconscious, clinging to a piece of the wreckage. When the 47 survivors were taken to Cardiff, Wales, she cabled her husband "saved alone".

Spafford immediately booked his passage and sailed for England. While their boat was passing over the spot where the Ville du Havre sank, the captain called out to tell the passengers. Spafford could not sleep after that and he comforted himself with the words "It is well; the will of God be done." He later wrote the hymn based on these words.

The music was written by Philip Bliss.  
I first learned this song in German. Theodore  
Kübler wrote the German version according to  
Horatio Spafford's song but changed some words.  
The first line in German begins "Wenn Frieden  
mit Gott, meine Seele durchdringt" —  
"When peace with God fills my soul." What  
more can we strive for?

Agnus Peters